

Muddy Arena Didn't Lessen Excitement Of Angelo Roping

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SAN ANGELO FAIRGROUNDS — Notes jotted down during the recent championship steer roping:

There must be 3000 head of people gathered out here to see San Angelo's annual steer roping. Kids are milling in all directions. The aisles and passageways are overloaded with citizens wearing western outfits.

I am sitting down low in the bleachers, far off the principal thoroughfare, and I've already suffered more body blows than the referee of a full-card wrestling match. If the cattle to be roped today are as hard to get settled as these spectators are, it'll be after dark before the first go-round is over.

The weather is perfect for an outdoor event: a warm 70 degrees with barely enough wind to ruffle the flags and bunting. Last week's rains have settled the dust. The only thing that can keep this from being a fast-time event is the fact that mud in the arena is ankle to knee deep on a big horse.

The mud is all the announcer can find to talk about. For the past half-hour he's been blabbing continuously about the soggy condition of the corral. Evidently he must think natives in the Shortgrass Country don't know or can't remember what rain does to dry dirt, because every other sentence refers to the mud and slush.

For a man who makes his living calling rodeos, this announcer fellow seems to be having a mighty hard time getting his facts straight, especially when he gets to talking about the connection between rodeos and the ranching industry. A few minutes ago he made a speech about the close relation between the two games.

Well, if that's so, why aren't they roping heifers instead of steers this season?

If these promoters had bought 80 head of heavy heifers to use this afternoon, I wouldn't mind betting that half the ranchers in the country would have shed tears of gratitude. In fact some of us might have been so grateful that we'd buy a lifetime membership in the rodeo association.

But no. No one ever thinks of us ranchers until he gets up in front of a microphone where he can chatter endlessly about the pioneers and the Indians. A lot of good that does for the heifer market.

If heifers don't start bringing a better price, a four-hour taped resume of the history the frontier isn't going to save the cow business.

The roping is starting now. The announcer was correct — mud is a handicap to both man and beast. You'd think it would take a week to tie down a steer in this kind of mess, yet times of 20 seconds or less are fairly common. But I guess most of these boys are so handy with a rope, they could gather the alligators out of a swamp without missing too many loops or dropping many wraps with their pigging strings.

The horses are good, too. Nearly every one of these old ponies could yank a brewery wagon out of a bog hole. One hombre is riding a big palomino that treats the steers to a high-atmosphere flip every time the rider hooks on to one. If that team doesn't leave here with the money, it sure won't be the horse's fault. Muddy or dry, he's about as classy a steer horse as this country has seen in a long time...

The crowd is starting to grow restless again. The show is about over, and everyone seems to be wanting to move on. The man on the public address system has sort of lost contact. He's evidently so exhausted that he's confused.

He just explained that the reason the fans couldn't organize a sporting proposition known as a "Calcutta pool" was that the tax agents had decided that such actions required a federal gambling stamp, plus a kickback of 10% on the gross of the pool.

He might be right about that stamp business. But no big city announcer is going to convince me that the government would settle for a mere 10%, even on a shipment of gold f.o.b. Washington.

Anyway, this has been a worthwhile adventure. Who'd have thought we'd ever have a roping in the mud right here in the middle of the Shortgrass country?